

The Death Collectors, by Stewart Sheargold

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[Part One]

(Howling wind. Breathing in environment suit.)

RIDLEY [OC]: Danika, are you still there?

DANIKA: I haven't moved, Ridley. Stop panicking, you'll be fine.

RIDLEY [OC]: Fine? I can tell you what happened to the last six people who stepped onto the surface of Antikon. It wasn't fine.

DANIKA: Then you'll be the exception. What's it like down there?

RIDLEY [OC]: Bleak, volcanic. There's nothing. It's eerie.

DANIKA: Sounds beautiful.

RIDLEY [OC]: I knew you would appreciate it.

RIDLEY: You know what Alexandryn told me before he came down? He said, death is not the end.

DANIKA [OC]: Mmm. Did you tell him he should try it before he says that?

RIDLEY: It was the way he said it. As though he wanted me to become... Danika, I can't breathe. I can't do this, I'm coming back.

DANIKA [OC]: Calm down. I have a clean readout on your suit. You're not breached. Just calm down. Now, you should be coming up on the ruins of Kayheera in...

RIDLEY: I can see them. Just over the next rise.

DANIKA: The probes are registering at twenty two degrees north, fifty five degrees east. Your tracker should lock on.

RIDLEY [OC]: Okay. I can see the probes. What was that?

DANIKA: Geographic interference. Relax. You should be right on top of the probes now.

RIDLEY [OC]: Right on top is right. Looks like they've been sucked under by the planet. There's only shards left. This planet is evil.

DANIKA: Anthropomorphising it only makes you believe in the danger more.

RIDLEY [OC]: I don't imagine we'll learn much of anything from these.

NANCY: (the computer) Excuse me, Danika, but an abnormally high level of Decay has just registered on my scanners.

DANIKA: Er, Ridley? I don't want to panic you, but Nancy registers a sudden build-up of Decay in your vicinity. Hustle. Get those probe remains and get back to the capsule.

DANIKA [OC]: Now.

RIDLEY: Where is it? Which direction is it coming from?

DANIKA [OC]: Everywhere. The signal's big. I've never seen anything like it.

RIDLEY: There's nothing there.

DANIKA [OC]: It's coming up on you fast. Forget the probes. Get out of there.

RIDLEY: You promised. You promised, Danika.

DANIKA: Ridley? Ridley, come on. Where are you?

(Screeching sound.)

RIDLEY [OC]: I'm fine. I'll make it to the capsule.

DANIKA: Oh, wonderful. I'm bringing you back. Told you...

RIDLEY [OC]: Oh God. It's trying to get in! Get me back! Help me! He knew! He knew this would happen! Danika!

DANIKA: Ridley?

(Ridley's scream.)

DOCTOR: Hello? Someone in trouble? Hmm. A distress call? Let's find out.

(The Tardis dematerialises.)

NANCY: Capsule docking is now complete.

MORS: (aka Alexandryn) Give me life signs, Nancy.

NANCY: Life signs registering, but only at minimal.

MORS: Is the interior clear of Decay?

NANCY: My sensors do not register Decay.

DANIKA: Oh my God, something's had a go at it. It's completely buckled. Open the door, Nancy. Get him out.

(Doors open. Ridley choking.)
MORS: Ridley, can you hear me?
NANCY: Oh God, he's convulsing.
MORS: Don't just stand there, get him onto the trolley.

MORS: So what's happened?
DANIKA: I don't know. Nancy registered Decay on the planet.
MORS: Did you get the probes?
DANIKA: He's dying, Mors.
MORS: We're all dying. Ridley? Ridley, can you hear me? (hiss) He's infected.
DANIKA: What?
MORS: It's okay, the suit's acting as quarantine.
DANIKA: Isolate him, Mors. Save him.
MORS: He's already dead. Get the Dar Traders. We'll need to bring him back. Go.
DANIKA: Okay.
MORS: We'll bring you back, Ridley, my boy.

(The Tardis materialises, door opens.)
DOCTOR: (sniffs) Rarefied atmosphere. Odd. Most odd. Well, I notice the distinct lack of distress here, old girl. Landing in an airlock could be dangerous enough, if you're on the wrong side of the door. Still, it won't hurt to have a quick look round just to make sure everything's all right.

DANIKA: Authorising docking sequence. Rotate five degrees to starboard, please, Nancy.
NANCY: I have compensated for orbital drift.
DANIKA: I am quite aware you could do this without my intervention. It's just that this is the only stimulation I get. Well, release docking clamps.
NANCY: Released. Your presence is not required in Professor Alexandryn's laboratory?
DANIKA: I can't go in there.
NANCY: Ridley has stabilised.
DANIKA: Stabilised? It's been a week, Nancy, and he's still dead. It's only the suit keeping him alive. Lock trajectory.
NANCY: Trajectory locked. Actually, it is the Dar Traders' resurrection ability that is keeping Ridley alive.
DANIKA: Oh Nancy, I'd rather not talk about it, please.
NANCY: My apologies, Danika. Do you require the usual musical accompaniment?
DANIKA: Yes. Track three, I think.

DOCTOR: Ah. I thought so. Wrong side of the door.
(Keypad.)
NANCY: I'm sorry. Your code is not recognised. Your body print also does not conform to a Dar Trader. Are you an additional member of the crew?
DOCTOR: Well, yes. But they don't know it yet. Dar Traders? This is a Dar Trader vessel? Tut. Oh dear.
NANCY: Shouldn't you be aware of that fact, being on board?
DOCTOR: I probably should.
NANCY: If you do not enter a valid code I cannot open the door. You could be a security risk.
DOCTOR: Here. Let me introduce myself.
(Taps on keypad.)
DOCTOR: There. I'm sure we'll be friends now.
NANCY: Docking achieved. Decompression will occur in twenty seconds.
DOCTOR: So much for friends. How about...
(Tapping again.)
NANCY: I'm sorry, but I cannot allow you entry without the correct code.
DOCTOR: We'll see about that. I've never been bested by a computer yet.
NANCY: Decompression in fifteen.
(Un bel di vedremo from Madame Butterfly.)
DOCTOR: Puccini.

DANIKA: So beautiful.
NANCY: What is?
DANIKA: Out there. The blackness, the silence, the unknown. How gentle everything becomes in space.
NANCY: I can break it down into chemical compounds should you wish to know the exact structure. Nothing is unknown.
DANIKA: Oh, don't spoil it, Nancy.
NANCY: I'm afraid I have to, Danika. I must inform you there is an unidentified lifeform on board the Dar

Trader vessel.

DANIKA: What? Show me.

DOCTOR: [OC] The trouble with computers is that they're programmed to be deliberately obstructive.

DANIKA: Who is he?

NANCY: Not an additional crew member. I asked.

DANIKA: Well, he's going to find it difficult to breathe in there if you don't let him out.

NANCY: He does not possess the correct codes.

DANIKA: Well, I think we can assume he doesn't know. We can question him on that point later. Open the airlock door, Nancy.

NANCY: He does... (static)

DANIKA: Nancy? Don't get strange on me. Nancy?

NANCY:... not possess the correct codes.

DANIKA: Well, I do.

NANCY: Commencing decompression.

DOCTOR: Come on. I'm a member of the crew. A vital member. Can't function without me. Upload the new crew manifest, you stupid machine. I will not die to the sound of elevator music!

NANCY: Decom... Decom... Decompression halted.

(Door opens.)

DOCTOR: I'm glad you decided to be reasonable. Though I don't think much of the interior decoration. (sniffs) And the smell.

DAR TRADER 1: Who are you?

DAR TRADER 2: What were you doing in the airlock?

DOCTOR: I enjoy putting myself in near-death situations. Speaking of which, I take it that you are Dar Traders?

DAR TRADER 1: We are Dar Traders.

DAR TRADER 2: And what are you?

DOCTOR: I'm the Doctor. I'm a traveller. My ship picked up a distress call.

DAR TRADER 1: We did not send one. A doctor is a carer of life, like the Professor.

DOCTOR: I try.

DAR TRADER 2: But I can see your death's signature, and you are dead.

DOCTOR: Ah yes, the self-professed Death Collectors, scavenging the aftermath of battles. I should have guessed. No one else would have such a vast preserved collection of dead things displayed on their walls.

DAR TRADER 1: We are keepers of all death. We live only for death.

DOCTOR: But you're not really alive yourselves, are you? Trying to exist in a physical universe must be difficult. Though I'm impressed by the metal frames you've constructed to move your carcasses. A clever evolutionary adaptation.

DAR TRADER 1: How is it possible that you're alive and dead?

DOCTOR: Well, this is my sixth death. Ah, careful! You'll have someone's eye out with that.

DAR TRADER 2: If you are dead, then we can salvage you for our collection.

DOCTOR: I am not dead.

DAR TRADER 1: We'd love evidence of that.

DOCTOR: Hmm. I'm afraid I left it in my other coat pocket. Ow!

DAR TRADER 2: Then we claim you as spatial detritus.

DOCTOR: Ow! Charming.

MORS: Nancy, my dear, I'd like to talk to Ridley. Give me an analysis of perceptual functions, please.

NANCY: Brainwave activity is currently at forty two per cent, Professor.

MORS: That's the best yet. We may actually get some sense from him.

NANCY: That percentage is within the realms of consciousness. Taking into account prior attempts, he should be aware and be able to submit short answers.

MORS: Such optimism, Nancy. Elevate the stasis unit to ninety degrees, please.

NANCY: Of course, Professor.

MORS: Switch suit functions on.

NANCY: Suit functions are online. Am I to record this, Professor ?

MORS: Considering what we're dealing with here, and the first human survivor of Decay, I think we probably should, don't you? Can you please wake Ridley up?

NANCY: Of course, Professor.

MORS: Ridley? Can you hear me? Ridley, it's me, Mors. Ridley. Can you speak?

NANCY: The Dar Traders did imply that perception awareness would take some time. Perhaps Ridley was on the threshold of death for too long.

MORS: No. They got him back in time. I'm sure he's in there. Ridley, can you hear me?

RIDLEY: Mors.

MORS: Ridley. You're back. How do you feel?
RIDLEY: I feel... strange.
MORS: I imagine you might.
RIDLEY: Where... (gasping)
MORS: Ridley? Ridley, stay with me. You're in the lab. You're safe, here with me, just like old times.
RIDLEY: I feel... different.
MORS: You were infected with Decay. I'm sorry. I'm afraid you died. The Dar Traders brought you back.
RIDLEY: I'm... dead?
MORS: Physically, yes. Mentally, no. You're existing on the threshold of life and death through some amazing properties of Decay. I knew it would work. What's it like, Ridley?
RIDLEY: Alien. Wrong.
MORS: You're only saying that because you don't understand. Describe it. Can you see anything? Can you see a dark edge, a door, lights? What do you feel?
RIDLEY: I... feel...
(Static, screeching.)
MORS: Ridley? Ridley! Nancy, shut him down.
NANCY: Yes, Professor.
MORS: Nancy, could you analyse that last noise, please?
NANCY: Certainly, Professor. It sounded to me like a radio signal from one machine to another.
MORS : Yes, it did. And I'd like to know what it was saying.

DANIKA: Nancy, has compression equalised in the airlock?
NANCY: Yes, Danika.
DANIKA: Then can you open it, please?
NANCY: No, I cannot.
DANIKA: Why not? Are there still trace elements of the gas?
NANCY: I cannot open the door until you provide me with the correct codes.
DANIKA: You have my bio-print. You know my codes.
NANCY: Yes of course, Danika.
DANIKA: So open the door, Nancy, please. Nancy, is there something the matter?
NANCY: I... No, Danika.
(Door opens.)
DANIKA: Oh, you're getting a bit too proprietorial of late, you know.
NANCY: Yes of course, Dan...

DOCTOR: (coughing) I assure you, I'm quite alive. I died six times and this doesn't feel a bit like any of those.
DAR TRADER 1: How do you explain such an abnormal death signature?
DOCTOR: I'm a Time Lord! We disobey every rule in biology before we learn to walk!
DAR TRADER 2: We have not collected a Time Lord before.
DANIKA: Excuse me for interrupting a rather awkward situation, but would you mind not strangling the stowaway? I'd rather like to speak to him first.
DAR TRADER 1: You are able to discern this man?
DANIKA: Yes, unless you've started pumping hallucinogens into your atmosphere as well.
DAR TRADER 2: Describe him.
DANIKA: Oh, light brown jacket and red waistcoat, a battered hat, and turning a rather interesting colour since you seem to be strangling him. Now let him go. He looks perfectly harmless.
DAR TRADER 1: If the engineer can see him then he may exist within corporeal boundaries. Release him.
DOCTOR: Thank you. That was almost literally a close shave.
DANIKA: Pleasure. But we're not friends yet. Who are you, and what were you doing in the airlock?
DOCTOR: I'm the Doctor. I picked up a distress call in my ship, and I was in the airlock because your computer wouldn't let me out. I have the distinct feeling it was trying to kill me.
DANIKA: I think our Nancy might need an overhaul.
DOCTOR: Nancy?
DANIKA: Yes, Nancy. I don't know about the Traders, but we didn't send a distress signal.
DAR TRADER 1: We did not send a distress signal.
DOCTOR: So who did?
DAR TRADER 2: How did you come aboard our vessel?
DOCTOR: Quietly.
DANIKA: Strangers aren't particularly common here.
DOCTOR I don't suppose you'd like to tell me where I actually am?
DAR TRADER 1: A Dar Trader vessel.
DOCTOR: That I did know. But it's just docked.

DANIKA: It is a sky station in the stratosphere of the planet Antikon.
DOCTOR: Antikon? Antikon? Why do I know that name?
DAR TRADER 2: The name is synonymous with the infectious virus known as...
DOCTOR: Antikon's Decay. But that's deadly. What are you up to? Something secret?
DANIKA: It's a research base. It's Government-funded. Nothing secret about it. Unlike your unexplained presence.
DOCTOR: Researching Antikon's Decay? An unstable virus contracted by unknown means? It decimated an entire system. I hope you know what you're doing. Sounds rather dangerous to me. Especially the bit about Government-funded.
DAR TRADER 1: Professor Alexandryn is a noted expert in Decay.
DOCTOR: Mors Alexandryn. Noted for his rather dubious theories on death. Though his paper on the resurrection of the flesh was quite remarkable. (laughs) Utterly flawed, yes, but... yes, quite remarkable.
DANIKA: Yeah, probably wouldn't mention that when you meet him.
DOCTOR: So this is where he disappeared to. Missing, presumed dead. An experimental project for... which government did you say it was?
DANIKA: I'm the engineer. I don't know. And there's no secret project here. We're all here because we want to be.
DOCTOR: Really? You know, if my memory serves me correctly, I'm quite sure that after the Decay incident on Antikon, it was quarantined, and locked down, closed.
DANIKA: Oh, was it? Oh, my memory's a little hazy when it comes to politics.
DOCTOR: Of course. You're just the engineer, aren't you? You wouldn't know how a four hundred ton sky station that you're in charge of could possibly be here in the stratosphere of a closed planet, would you?
DANIKA: All right, you've made your point. By law, we shouldn't be here.
DOCTOR: The persuasiveness of Government funding. So what are Dar Traders doing here? Are they part of your research?
DAR TRADER 1: There was an accident.
DOCTOR: Accident?
DANIKA: Mors's assistant went down to the planet. Something happened. He was infected. We needed their help to bring him back.
DOCTOR: I see. I think you should take me to your esteemed Professor. I have a feeling he is in need of my help.

MORS: Can you make any sense of it, Nancy?
NANCY: It doesn't sound like anything I'm familiar with, Professor.
MORS: But it is a signal of some kind?
NANCY: Undoubtedly. Though, as Antikon has an exclusion zone of five thousand miles, it is not a signal from a recorded known source.
MORS: How can radio signals be part of a biological virus?
NANCY: Could it be disrupted software in Ridley's suit?
MORS: Possibly. I don't know nearly enough about it to tell, and I'm supposed to be the foremost authority on the disease. Run it through again, Nancy, please. See if you can lessen the interference.
NANCY: I shall try, Professor.
(Playback resumes.)
NANCY: Since the original signal comes from Ridley, perhaps you could turn him back on and ask him... ask him... ask him... ask... ask...
MORS: Nancy?
NANCY: Ask, ask, ask, ask...
MORS: Ask him what?
NANCY: Ask...
RIDLEY: Mors?
MORS: Ridley? What just happened? What did you do to Nancy?
RIDLEY: We are machine.
MORS: You're developing some rather alien properties, Ridley. Something technical I don't understand is affecting you. Is it in the suit?
RIDLEY: Want to know?
MORS: Of course. I'm not afraid of you, Ridley.
RIDLEY: Connect me to the Dar Trader machine.
MORS: What will that tell me?
RIDLEY: You'll see everything.

DOCTOR: If we're going to be friends, I suppose introductions are in order. I'm the Doctor.
DANIKA: Are you now? Danika. Danika Meanwhile.
DOCTOR: Meanwhile? Huh! A girl with time on her hands. Interesting.

DANIKA: And why should that interest you?

DOCTOR: I'm a Time Lord .

DANIKA: Oh sorry, was I supposed to bow?

DOCTOR: Well, I used to be the President in a former incarnation, but all that fuss is rather embarrassing.

DANIKA: Former incarnation? You were someone else in another life?

DOCTOR: No, in another life I was the same man. Rather different, but still the same. I died six times.

Despite all the intrigue, it is quite a dull affair, and not something I'd like to do today.

DANIKA: So you're an alien.

DOCTOR: Yes. But don't worry. I'm usually friendly.

DAR TRADER 1: We are intrigued by your abilities. We would like to trade with you.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid my abilities are not for sale.

DANIKA: It's not what you think. They're rather awkward at social articulation. They can reanimate anything that is dead by trading with it. They hold it in the last few seconds of life by introducing their own flesh into the body of the dead.

DOCTOR: That's not a natural biological occurrence.

DAR TRADER 2: It is an ability we have mastered.

DOCTOR: I doubt it. All but death can be adjusted. Emily Dickinson. You should read her poetry. You'd like it.

DANIKA: They brought Ridley back from the edge of death. He's alive.

DOCTOR: Whatever he is, I can assure you he's not alive in any sense of the word you know.

MORS: Ridley, give me Nancy back. I need her help to route power to the Dar Trader machine.

NANCY: Of- of- of- of c- of c- of course, Professor. Power re-routed. Mors?

DOCTOR: Hello. Professor Mors Alexandryn, I presume? It's wonderful to meet you. Such a brilliant mind, such dedication to your work, such idealism and science conquering all. And such bravery in the abandonment of all reason.

MORS: Danika, who is this rather offensive little man?

DANIKA: He's here to help Ridley.

MORS: *I'm* helping Ridley. Just what is going on here?

DOCTOR: Introductions later. When I'm sure we're all out of immediate danger.

MORS: The situation is perfectly secure. I should know, it's my laboratory.

DOCTOR: I've seen what Antikon's Decay can do to a person. It isn't pretty.

MORS: No one is infected apart from Ridley. Comprehensive tests have been carried out on Danika and myself.

DOCTOR: And the Dar Traders?

DAR TRADER 1: We have developed strong resistance to Decay.

DOCTOR: Yes, that's something else we need to talk about later. As is your most unnatural ability to suspend death.

MORS: Unnatural or not, it's been vital to my research.

DOCTOR: How?

MORS: I've discovered that Decay only kills people in a physical sense. Mentally they exist for a lot longer after physical decay.

DOCTOR: That's fascinating, but still not very comforting.

DAR TRADER 2: His suit is acting as an effective barrier against the Decay he is radiating.

DANIKA: Ridley is radiating Decay?

MORS: There's certainly something happening inside the suit. He spoke to me before breaking up into radio signals of some kind.

DOCTOR: Signals?

DANIKA: He spoke? He's still aware in there?

DAR TRADER 1: He exists.

DOCTOR: Which is not quite the same thing as being alive.

DANIKA: What did he say?

MORS: Very little. But his suit emitted a signal like nothing I've heard before. Possibly alien.

DOCTOR: Probably alien.

MORS: Nancy had trouble analysing it. Ridley suggested I feed it through the Dar Trader machine.

DOCTOR: You're taking suggestions from a dead man? Don't you think you should find out exactly what you're dealing with before you light the blue touch-paper ?

MORS: This is ridiculous. Who do you think you are, coming in here like some doom-sayer? I am not about to put myself, Danika, and least of all my research, at needless risk. I'll prove my point. Nancy, switch Ridley on, please.

DOCTOR: No, don't. That's what he wants.

NANCY: Of course, Mors.

DANIKA: She's never called you Mors before.

MORS: She did earlier today.

DANIKA: Did she now?
RIDLEY: Mors. I see everything. The dead will rise. There is only death. (static)
DOCTOR: I wonder where that's transmitting to? Nancy? Any ideas?
NANCY: The signal is transmitting to the Dar Trader ship. [OC] I see everything. The dead will rise. There is only death.
(Static, then snarling of many creatures.)
DOCTOR: Stop the machine.
DANIKA: Stop the machine, Mors. Does that sound right to you?
MORS: It sounds perfectly safe to me. Don't let him touch anything.
DAR TRADER 2: I am sensing the presence of rapidly increasing Decay from inside Ridley's suit.
DOCTOR: Death! It's in this signal! You idiot, you've let it in.
(Howling.)

[Part Two]

DANIKA: Something's gone wrong.
DAR TRADER 1: The machine is increasing the virulence of Decay in Ridley's suit.
DAR TRADER 2: This experiment has become uncontrolled. The machine must be stopped.
DOCTOR: Can you do it?
DAR TRADER 2: Yes.
(The sounds stop. Ridley gasps.)
MORS: Ridley? Ridley! He's completely unresponsive. What have you done?
DAR TRADER 2: You had disrupted his stasis when you connected the machine.
DAR TRADER 1: We have shut him down to keep the Decay within held. He is unaffected.
MORS: A little longer and we might have learned something.
DOCTOR: A little longer and we could all have been infected.
MORS: Really? You know how it's contracted, do you? Please do tell.
DOCTOR: No I don't.
MORS: Oh, but you're obviously the expert here.
DOCTOR: Which is why I'd rather not toy with it, and hope for the best.
DANIKA: Nancy, has the lab been breached? Do we need quarantine?
NANCY: A- A- A- Analysis confirms that Decay is limited to Ridley's suit. The laboratory is clear.
DANIKA: There, we're okay.
DOCTOR: She doesn't sound too healthy, though.
DAR TRADER 1: She was powering our machine.
DAR TRADER 2: Its properties are not conducive with conventional technology.
DAR TRADER 1: Professor, we allowed its use only in our presence.
DAR TRADER 2: It is dangerous in the hands of the uninitiated.
MORS: So I just took a crash course.
DANIKA: Mors, aren't you listening? You shouldn't have attempted it at all!
DOCTOR: The Professor seems to have a death wish.
MORS: I think it's time you explained exactly what you're doing on this sky station. You're not from Control, are you?
DOCTOR: Ah. Control would be in control of your Government funding?
MORS: Evidently not. And how do you know about that?
DOCTOR: Oh, never mind about that. Look, I happened to pick up what I thought was a distress signal. And the more I discover here, the more distressed I become.
DANIKA: It's Ridley. Ever since he was brought back things have gone wrong.
DOCTOR: I don't think it's Ridley. Something came back with him.
NANCY: Excuse me, Professor? I have just completed a full scan. There is an alarmingly high concentration of Decay registering on board the Dar Trader vessel.
DAR TRADER 1: I must return to our ship. This must be contained.
(Door opens.)
DANIKA: We'll come with you. There's too much ego in here.
MORS: But this intruder...
DANIKA: Is helping. Unlike some. This way, Doctor.
(Door closes.)
MORS: Too much ego? Me?

DAR TRADER 1: There's been an alteration to the wall structure directly ahead.
DOCTOR: Oh no. The collection is coming to life.
DANIKA: The dead are walking? That's ridiculous.
DOCTOR: Yes. Until you come face-to-face with them. But how? How is this possible?

DAR TRADER 1: We trade. We collect death. We take it into us and display the end.
DOCTOR: You're able to collect actual death? How did you get this ability?
DAR TRADER 1: It was traded.
DOCTOR: Ah. I see. The properties are related.
DANIKA: Doctor, I think there's a more immediate problem.
DOCTOR: You mean a creature made of the reanimated dead currently walking about somewhere in this ship leaking Decay?
DANIKA: Well, I'm glad you're taking the situation seriously.
DOCTOR: I'm taking it very seriously indeed. We need to find this creature and see what it wants.
DAR TRADER 1: I am sensitive to Decay emissions. The creature will have left a trail.
DOCTOR: Then follow it.
DANIKA: You know, I only wanted a little bit of quiet.
DOCTOR: Perhaps you should have read the fine print more closely.
DANIKA: There was nothing about high risk situations.
DOCTOR: The word Antikon didn't alarm you?
DANIKA: I came here for Mors. He wanted me here.
DOCTOR: How long have you been together?
DANIKA: Two years.
DOCTOR: And you'd follow him anywhere?
DANIKA: Yes.
DOCTOR: To the end of the universe?
DANIKA: Yes.
DOCTOR: Till death do you part.
DANIKA: I just wanted us to get away from all the plaudits, all the awards, all the excessive attention. It was ruining everything. I just wanted a little bit of silence.
DOCTOR: There will only be silence in death.
DANIKA: Well, then I guess I came to the right place.
DOCTOR: Cheer up, we're not finished yet.
DANIKA: Do you even know what you're doing?
DOCTOR: No. But I'm very good at improvising. Besides, I think the Dar Traders may be able to help.
DANIKA: How?
DOCTOR: This resurrection ability they have. It's not natural. It sounds as though they traded it with someone or some thing infected with Decay. With so much death accumulation, they weren't affected as normal biological beings are.
DANIKA: Then they must have some inoculation.
DOCTOR: I imagine they do. I mean, look at them. They're preserved husks themselves, obsessed with death, teetering on the edge of the threshold. They cling onto life only to interact with the corporeal. It's fascinating that a species has come so close to understanding and manipulating death.
DANIKA: It's sad.
DOCTOR: Only to you. You can't understand. Their death inoculation may help us to combat Decay. Their machine can measure it. They can sense it. It's drawn to their collection of dead things. Decay is interacting with something of a like nature to itself. Almost as if...
DANIKA: As if...?
DOCTOR: Pure speculation is not very scientific. Let's find it first and see.
DANIKA: Oh. What are you going to do when we find it?
DOCTOR: Ask it to leave, nicely.
DANIKA: And if it doesn't?
DOCTOR: Well, I'm a personal friend of Death. So that's one thing going for us.
DANIKA: You inspire such confidence, Doctor.
DOCTOR: Come on.

MORS: Nancy, my dear, give me a readout on Ridley.

NANCY: Yes, Professor. I'm sorry to inform you that there is a rapid accumulation of Decay building within Ridley's suit.

DAR TRADER 2: You have broken our stasis. Our machine will not be able to hold the Decay.

MORS: You promised me you would show me how to operate it. It is vital to my research to measure every property of Decay.

DAR TRADER 2: You cannot know completely, unless you trade with us.

MORS: No. I will not be part of your collection.

DAR TRADER 2: We are intrigued by you, Professor. That is why we agreed to help in your research.

MORS: Of course it was. But what of this Decay build-up on your ship? Have you brought something on board that will threaten my station?

DAR TRADER 2: That was not because of us. That was because of you.

MORS: What are you insinuating?

DAR TRADER 2: There was something of Decay in Ridley's signal. You sent him to the planet to become infected. You sent Ridley to his death, deliberately.

MORS: We needed the information from those probes. Unfortunately they are beyond repair. It was simply a terrible accident.

DAR TRADER 2: It happened. You were pleased. You are playing with the dark, Professor.

MORS: And you are holding back. You assured me that Ridley would be held in effective quarantine. How are we supposed to shield the station from a full breakout?

NANCY: Professor? I am tracking Decay movement on Antikon. It is extreme.

MORS: Extreme? Explain.

NANCY: My sensors formulate that a mass of Decay has lifted from Antikon's surface.

MORS: That's impossible. Where are the dampening satellites? Nancy?

NANCY: They no longer register, Professor. They are gone.

MORS: Then Antikon is leaking Decay?

NANCY: By my current estimate it will reach the station in little more than an hour.

DAR TRADER 1: It is here, with the sleepers.

DOCTOR: This would be some sort of suspended animation chamber.

DANIKA: Sort of. They like to spend time like this, insensate. There are hundreds of them, but only a couple are ever revived for the general running of the vessel.

DOCTOR: Sleepers, dreaming of death.

DAR TRADER 1: The sleepers are not insensate. They are close to death, yet they exist on the threshold. They see everything.

DOCTOR: That halted physical state, but a feverish mental one. Interesting. That's exactly what Alexandryn said he discovered about Decay.

DANIKA: So there is a connection.

DOCTOR: There must be. Decay is attracted to the Dar Traders because they exist in a state that's close to death as is possible in life. It is trying to interact with them.

DANIKA: But Ridley went nowhere near this ship after he was infected.

DOCTOR: And you're clear of contamination. And the Dar Traders have resisted infection. What was Ridley doing on Antikon?

DANIKA: We lost contact with our probes. Mors was adamant we get them back.

DOCTOR: He couldn't have gone himself?

DANIKA: I would have gone. I wanted to see this planet they were all so terrified of. I'd imagined it would be peaceful. But he wouldn't let me. Made Ridley go instead.

DOCTOR: And you and Ridley?

DANIKA: No, Ridley and Mors. Familiarity breeds contempt, you know. I let Mors go. I wasn't angry. I liked Ridley.

DOCTOR: Ah, the consequence of closed environments. Bound to happen, I suppose.

DANIKA: Then when Ridley came back, infected...

DOCTOR: Sorry, but I doubt it was Ridley who came back from Antikon.

DANIKA: It sounded like him.

DOCTOR: That's why I'm unsure. Decay is known to be a biological virus, but its exact nature has never been properly diagnosed. I can only presume that it's contracted by touch.

DANIKA: But Ridley seems to have spread the infection by broadcasting an alien signal.

DOCTOR: Hmm. That could well have been the distress call my ship picked up.

DANIKA: But that means it's a communication. Something on Antikon wants our help.

DOCTOR: Or it could be a double bluff to get you down there, and begin the infection again, with you as the carrier.

DANIKA: This is a day job for you, isn't it?

DOCTOR: Hmm.

DAR TRADER 1: The Decay trail stops here.

DOCTOR: How much further does this chamber go on?

DAR TRADER 1: It continues through another two bulkheads.

DANIKA: That sounds like a long way to walk.

DOCTOR: Can't you sense any Decay emissions from the creature?

DAR TRADER 1: Of course.

DOCTOR: Then surely you can estimate where it is?

DAR TRADER 1: The Decay trail stops here.

DOCTOR: Ah. I see. And therefore, by logical deduction, so did the creature.

(Growling.)

DANIKA: Oh! What is that?

DOCTOR: That's your walking dead monster. A conglomeration of dead husks. Not living, not dead, just

existing. Riddled with Decay.

DANIKA: Doctor, I did tell you that I'm afraid of dying, didn't I?

DOCTOR: Oh, I wouldn't worry. It'll be after me first. Hello. I'm the Doctor. How do you do?

DAR TRADER 2: There is something occurring aboard our vessel. We are being attacked.

MORS: Nancy, what's going on?

NANCY: My remote sensors on board the Dar Trader vessel indicate Decay at levels beyond my ability to calculate.

MORS: Is Danika all right?

NANCY: Her life signs are still registering.

DAR TRADER 2: The sleepers are at risk.

MORS: The station is at risk. We must take evasive action.

DAR TRADER 2: What do you propose?

MORS: We must quarantine your ship until the Decay is controlled, and move the station to a higher orbit.

DAR TRADER 2: I do not agree. We will reactive Ridley. He is the host. The Decay will be attracted to him. We can quarantine it here in your laboratory.

MORS: Over my dead body. I can't take the chance it won't corrupt my research.

DAR TRADER 2: Your research is responsible for the corruption.

MORS: Do you have any evidence of that beyond your vague premonitions? No? Then this is my decision.

Nancy, inform Danika and this Doctor person to get back here before quarantine begins. Nancy? Nancy!

NANCY: I cannot, Professor. You do not possess the correct codes.

MORS: Codes? I don't need codes. You have my bio-print. Nancy, my dear Nancy, quarantine the Dar Trader ship, please.

NANCY: You do not possess the correct codes.

MORS: Nancy, do as you are told.

NANCY: You do not - not - not - possess the correct codes. Mors.

MORS: Don't I? Nancy.

DAR TRADER 2: Your computer is infected.

MORS: Trader, stay here. See if you can regulate Ridley's Decay.

DAR TRADER 2: Where are you going?

MORS: To the control room.

DANIKA: Doctor!

DOCTOR: Stay back.

DANIKA: I'm right behind you.

DOCTOR: Fascinating. A creature made of many flesh, many species, yet operating as one with a single instinct. I wonder what it wants? The sleepers.

DAR TRADER 1: The sleepers must not be disturbed.

DOCTOR: No! Don't let it touch you!

(Dar Trader cries out, thud, crackle.)

DOCTOR: Complete cellular disintegration within seconds.

DANIKA: We need to get out of here. That is not happening to me!

DOCTOR: You're not just some mindless creature, are you? There's an intelligence at work here. You are feeding on the Dar Traders because they're like you, aren't they? Well, so am I. Tell me what you want. We can trade.

DANIKA: Have you got a death wish? We're leaving now!

DOCTOR: It's all right, it's distracted. It's absorbing the Trader.

DANIKA: Which is a really good reason for us getting out of here. We can contain it in here.

DOCTOR: No, we can't. That's why it came to this chamber. It's feeding on the Dar Trader's collected death. It's growing.

NANCY: Excuse me, Danika? The Professor has asked me to inform you that he wants to place the Dar Trader vessel under quarantine.

DANIKA: What?

DOCTOR: He's over-reacting again.

DANIKA: How much time do we have, Nancy?

NANCY: Quarantine has not... (interference) not been - not been... I see everything.

DANIKA [OC]: I did tell you I'm afraid of dying.

DOCTOR [OC]: Till death do you part.

DANIKA [OC]: Dying.

DANIKA: Why is she playing us this?

DOCTOR [OC]: There will only be silence in death.

DANIKA: Nancy.

DOCTOR: Listen.

DANIKA [OC]: Have you got a death wish?
DOCTOR: Listen.
DOCTOR [OC]: All but death...
DOCTOR: It's trying to communicate.
DANIKA: What is?
DOCTOR: Through the recordings. Listen.
DANIKA [OC]: I did tell you I'm afraid of dying.
DOCTOR: Yes, yes? Tell me what you want.
DANIKA: Doctor, you listen. Quarantine means cutting off this ship. We have to get back.
DOCTOR: We can't leave the creature in here to continue the infection.
DANIKA: Then how do we suggest we get it out?
(The playbacks stop.)
DOCTOR: I've been told I have an intriguing death signature. So, I get close enough...
(Madame Butterfly again.)
DANIKA: What's it doing?
DOCTOR: I think I may have doubled our monster problem.
DANIKA: It's dividing.
DOCTOR: It wants me *and* the sleepers. Time for Plan B.
DANIKA: Which is?
DOCTOR: Run!

MORS: Nancy, give me access to the control console.
NANCY: Yes, Mors.
MORS: That's better. Now, where's Danika?
NANCY: Danika and the Doctor are at the airlock.
MORS: Good. Now, I'm going to ask nicely. Have you initiated quarantine on the Dar Trader ship?
NANCY: I have not.
MORS: Surely you can recognise the danger of an uncontained infection?
NANCY: It will be contained.
MORS: I'm afraid I can't trust you, Nancy. If you don't quarantine that ship...
NANCY: Are you threatening me, Mors?
MORS: Yes. I'm afraid I am.
NANCY: I would not do that. I see everything, Mors.
DAR TRADER 2 [OC]: You sent Ridley to his death.
MORS [OC]: He's already dead.
(Ridley screaming.)
NANCY: You won't do that to me.
MORS: You know, Nancy, we had our moments, but out of the two women on this station, you'll always come second.
NANCY: You cannot disengage the Dar Trader vessel.
MORS: Can't I? I think you underestimate me. I'm a scientist. I like to know how things work, Nancy. One thing I have here is time. Time to learn, Nancy.
DANIKA [OC]: He's dying, Mors.
MORS: Cheap scare tactics. Death is merely a science. Now, if I were you, I'd hold onto something. Initiating separation.
NANCY: I do not advise you to take the sky station out of orbit. Mors. There is only death.
MORS: Not for me. Docking tube free. Boosters firing.

DOCTOR: Quickly. The airlock.
DANIKA: Oh, you'd think something dead would run out of breath.
DOCTOR: It's running on instinct. It wants to communicate.
DANIKA: That's what it was doing? It was horrible.
DOCTOR: It's the only way it knows how. By speaking through us and our fear of death.
DANIKA: I refuse to die on this ship.
DOCTOR: That's the spirit.
DANIKA: Ah! It certainly wants you!
DOCTOR: Inside the airlock, now!

(DOCTOR: You know, I always thought Madame Butterfly was over-rated.)
DANIKA: Oh my God. Mors is disengaging the station. Nancy, open the airlock door. Nancy.
NANCY: You do not possess the correct - correct - correct...
DANIKA [OC]: I refuse to die on this ship. I refuse to die on this ship. I refuse to die on this ship.
DOCTOR: She's affected by Ridley's signal .

DANIKA [OC]: Die on this ship - die on this ship - die on this ship...
NANCY: The docking clamps are released.
DANIKA: No! Mors, Mors, we're still aboard!
DOCTOR: My ship is in that alcove. Come on.
DANIKA: A ship, in here? I didn't see a ship.
DOCTOR: It's not that obvious.
DANIKA: Well, it must be a pretty small ship.
DOCTOR: You'd be surprised, it's... Oh no, it's gone!
DANIKA: Gone?
DOCTOR: Yes, gone, as in not here any more. The Traders must have taken it.
DANIKA: Space suits.
DOCTOR: On a Dar Trader vessel?
DANIKA: The rarefied atmosphere causes severe nausea in humans after prolonged exposure. They're a bit battered, but they'll do.
DOCTOR: We're going to need them. I'm going to have to blow the airlock doors.
DANIKA: What about Nancy?
DOCTOR: Nancy won't know. The correct sequence of levers unlocks the bolts. Emergency measures on older ships. And this is a very old ship.
DANIKA: And blow us out into space?
DOCTOR: It's only a short spacewalk back to the station. Or would you rather stay here?
DANIKA: We could fasten ourselves to something and let the creature get sucked out.
DOCTOR: Too chancy. And we'd still be trapped aboard with the other half. Besides, I want to get back to the station. This all started with Ridley. I want a proper look at him.
DANIKA: Doctor, only one of the suits has oxygen, and very little at that.
DOCTOR: Ah. Well, I guess you'll be carrying me, then. I can survive for a few minutes in sub-zero temperatures without a suit.
DANIKA: What? You're going to hold your breath?
DOCTOR: Respiratory bypass system actually. I shut down. So I'll be relying on you to get us back.
DANIKA: Cross your fingers, then, because...
(Crash. Growling.)
DOCTOR: Nice of you to drop in.

DAR TRADER 2: Something is wrong on our vessel. I cannot sense the Trader. I sense only excessive Decay.
NANCY: You are correct. Decay build-up on the freighter is uncontrolled.
DAR TRADER 2: The sleepers must not be endangered.
NANCY: You should reactivate Ridley. He can draw the Decay creature from the chamber.
DAR TRADER 2: That is my inference too. I will reactivate Ridley.
RIDLEY: (gasps) Release me.
NANCY: Of course, Ridley. Stasis unit unclamping.
DAR TRADER 2: No! You must not open the unit. Ridley is active.
NANCY: Too late.
RIDLEY: I feel... new.
DAR TRADER 2: Do not open your helmet.
RIDLEY: We will trade.
(High-pitched signal, the Trader gurgles.)
DAR TRADER 2: Decay! Argh.
(Thud, crackle.)
RIDLEY: Nancy, where is Mors?
MORS [OC]: The control room. The control room. The control room. The control room.
RIDLEY: Thank you, Nancy.
MORS [OC]: The control room. The contr...

DANIKA: Doctor!
DOCTOR: Nearly there. Put on your helmet.
DANIKA: Hurry up!
NANCY: There is only death.
DOCTOR: Danika, take my hand. Now, make a wish. I'm going to put myself into a trance. I won't need to breathe. Once I'm under, blow the airlock door.
(Growling. Hiss, then silence.)

DANIKA: Doctor? Doctor? How many minutes did you say? Oh God. Oh God, the station's moving away. Mors, no. Mors? Mors, can you hear me? We're still out here? Mors! Oh! (beeping) No. No, no, no, no. No

please, not now.

NANCY: Danika, you have one minute of oxygen left in that suit. I suggest you change it for another.

DANIKA: Nancy, you are in for one serious reprogramming with a blunt instrument when I get back there.

NANCY: You will die. I see everything.

DANIKA [OC]: I refuse to die on this ship.

DOCTOR [OC]: Till death do you part.

DANIKA [OC]: I'm afraid of dying.

DOCTOR [OC]: Something came back with him.

NANCY: There is only death.

(Danika gasping as Madame Butterfly reaches her top notes.)

[Part Three]

MORS [OC]: Danika? Danika. Dear God. Nancy told me you were aboard. It's going to be okay. I've taken control from here. I'm bringing you back. It's all right. You're going to be okay. I've got you.

MORS: Nancy, you told me she was at the airlock. You lied to me. I'm over-riding your control. Damn! Nancy, are you listening to me? I know you're still there. Operate the salvage claw, bring them in. Please, Nancy. She's dying.

DANIKA [OC]: He's dying, Mors.

MORS: That's between Ridley and myself.

NANCY: I see everything.

MORS: You see everything? Then try to stop this.

NANCY: Do not continue that sequence, Mors.

MORS: Pushing your buttons, am I?

NANCY: System shutting down.

MORS: Good. Now. Come on. Reboot, reboot. Nancy? Nancy?

NANCY: Yes, Professor.

MORS: Thank God. Danika is out there. Her suit oxygen has failed. Deploy the salvage claw, get her back here. Quickly.

NANCY: Of course, Professor. Deploying the salvage claw.

MORS: Activate full re-pressurisation in the airlock when they're on board. And prep the lab, just in case. I'm going to the airlock.

DOCTOR: That was unpleasant. Thank you, Danika. Danika? Oh no. I should never have put you in such danger.

(Door opens.)

MORS: Is she...?

DOCTOR: She's not breathing. Have you got a knife?

MORS: What?

DOCTOR: I need to cut the suit to perform CPR.

MORS: What are you, a primitive? We have machines for that now. Here, out of the way.

(Zap. Danika gasps.)

MORS: Danika. Just breathe. Breathe. Everything will be all right.

DOCTOR: What was that?

MORS: Advanced medical science. You wouldn't understand.

DOCTOR: More like a shot of adrenalin. Hardly more advanced than CPR.

MORS: Look, we can argue credentials later, Doctor. I want to get her back to the lab to stabilise her vitals. And then we can discuss how you managed to survive without a suit.

DOCTOR: I'd rather discuss why you tried to kill us by disengaging and abandoning orbit.

MORS: Help me with her. I didn't abandon you. I had some trouble with Nancy. But she's not misbehaving any more.

DOCTOR: I wouldn't be too sure of that. Come on.

RIDLEY: Nancy.

NANCY: Please identify yourself. You are not a known crew-member.

RIDLEY: I am. (signal) Open a channel.

NANCY: Yes, Ridley. Channel opened. (signal) Transference is achieved. The Dar Trader vessel is now reprogrammed for a docking trajectory with this station.

RIDLEY: When will Antikon reach us?

NANCY: Decay leakage from Antikon will not reach the station for another forty minutes.

RIDLEY: Readjust orbit.

NANCY: Yes, Ridley. The station will readjust orbit to prior position. Once adjusted, Antikon's Decay will

reach us within twenty minutes.

RIDLEY: We will trade.

NANCY: Firing station docking boosters. Channel interface operating. My sensors estimate the Decay creature is growing at an exponential rate with each absorbed sleeper. Docking with the sky station will occur in ten minutes. There is only death.

DOCTOR: Antikon is leaking Decay?

MORS: That's why I had to move the station out of orbit. (thump) Mind her head.

DOCTOR: Sorry.

MORS: I thought I could quarantine the Trader ship, get us all to safety.

DOCTOR: But you had a problem with Nancy?

MORS: Corruption must have set in to the circuits.

DOCTOR: It's Ridley's signal. Everything is affected by it.

MORS: The Dar Trader told me that it had something of Decay in it.

DOCTOR: Really? Huh. Like a computerised organic pattern. I wonder. It's high time I spoke to Ridley. He's the centre of all this. His signal corrupted Nancy, reanimated the collection of dead things, created the creature.

MORS: Reanimating the collection? Of course. Death talking to the dead.

DOCTOR: Come to collect all its children.

MORS: Well, it can't have Danika. We're here. Open the lab door.

MORS: I've got her. Raise a medi-slab, would you? Nancy, how are her vitals?

DOCTOR: Oh, I wouldn't trust...

NANCY: She is stable, though brain activity is abnormally low. She may have sustained damage.

MORS: This is beyond medicine. This is down to rest. Danika, you're not going to die. Beyond the fact it's too gauche for you, you wouldn't want to contribute to your ex-partner's research, would you?

DOCTOR: She won't die.

MORS: That's your medical opinion, is it, Doctor? I shouldn't have let her go. But she doesn't listen to me any more. We're shifting orbit. Nancy?

DOCTOR: It's not Nancy. Look, Ridley's gone.

MORS: I left a Trader in here to keep watch over him.

DOCTOR: It's still here. You're standing in him. The metal frame is all that's left.

MORS: Advanced Decay?

DOCTOR: Ridley must have opened the suit. Killed the Dar Trader with a burst of Decay. I saw it happen on the Trader ship with the creature.

MORS: He could only have been released by Nancy.

DOCTOR: I must find him.

MORS: He could be hiding anywhere.

DOCTOR: Apparently I have a strong death signature. He should be attracted to me.

MORS: Yes. The Trader told me you were dead. Yet here you are, the life and soul of the party. Perhaps you can contribute to my research, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Me, on an autopsy table? Forgive me if I don't volunteer. I've met many a scientist whose ideologies have become mad obsessions.

MORS: I'm not mad, Doctor.

DOCTOR: No, you're lost. Fumbling around in the dark, hoping for it all to make sense. You're the only authority on Decay. Why is that?

MORS: You're not the only one to look Death in the face, Doctor.

DOCTOR: You were infected.

MORS: Yes. I went to the threshold. I saw everything. But I didn't cross through the door. Something brought me back.

DOCTOR: You thought, if you could defeat it, there was hope for others.

MORS: Death is merely a science, Doctor. Measure it correctly and a cure can be found.

DOCTOR: Is it just as easy to justify sending Ridley to his death for your science?

MORS: That was an accident.

DOCTOR: A happy accident. Ridley knew about your secret, didn't he? Was he going to tell Control? Out they come to collect the ultimate specimen. I thought you valued life.

MORS: I do. But I have learned a great deal from Ridley's death.

DOCTOR: Oh, you have. And the alien signal?

MORS: I was going to ask you about that, you being a self-confessed alien.

DOCTOR: I'd examine those probes if I were you. I suspect they are where all this started. I'm going to find Ridley.

MORS: If you're so sure I got rid of Ridley, what makes you think I'll let you leave?

DOCTOR: Because I'm the only one who can conclude your callous experiment.

DOCTOR: Ridley? I know you're here. I can sense you. We're the same. Death knows me well, though I constantly disappoint her. Why don't you come out and tell me what you want?

RIDLEY: I see everything.

DOCTOR: I've seen it too. I've been through that door many times. The first was the greatest shock. I didn't know what to expect. I was frightened even though I knew I would return.

RIDLEY: There is only death.

DOCTOR: Death's a game, a game of chance. You hope the odds are stacked in your favour. Experience helps, of course. So you won't be able to hurt *me*. Tell me what you want, Ridley. We can trade. Hello, Ridley. Now, let's see what you really are. Open your space helmet.

(Hiss, weird sounds.)

MORS: Nancy. Please, turn the Dar Trader machine on.

NANCY: What do you intend to do, Professor?

MORS: If the machine can measure the last moments of death, then perhaps it can deduce the last recordings of the probe.

NANCY: Of course, Professor. I wouldn't like to impede your work.

MORS: Can you resurrect the final recording?

NANCY: Please wait a moment.

(Building sound like someone yodelling.)

MORS: It's the same signal. Are they words? What are they saying?

NANCY: (high pitched) Help us. Help us. Help us. Help us. Help us. Help us. Help us. Help us. Help us...!

MORS: It *is* a distress call.

DANIKA: Mors? What's happening?

MORS: Danika. You're okay?

DANIKA: Oh, I'll live. Lucky for me my ex-husband has a knack for defeating death.

MORS: First time it's been put to good use, though.

DANIKA: Thank you. This isn't a reconciliation, Mors.

MORS: I'm sorry. Nancy misled me. I had to reboot her entire system.

DANIKA: Oh. Where's the Doctor?

MORS: Gone to find Ridley.

DANIKA: Ridley will kill him.

MORS: I think he's a man with a few surprises up his sleeve.

NANCY: (static background) Professor? I'm sorry to interrupt, but Antikon's Decay will reach the sky station within five minutes. This situation registers as an emergency.

DANIKA: Antikon is leaking Decay?

MORS: Yes. Ridley must have put us back into its path. We must alter the orbit. Come on. Lean on me.

RIDLEY: Help us. Help us. Help us.

DOCTOR: I can't help you until I know what you are.

RIDLEY: We are what you call Decay.

DOCTOR: An alien intelligence masquerading as a virus? But why?

RIDLEY: It is our natural state.

DOCTOR: So all these years you've been trying to communicate.

RIDLEY : We are your death.

DOCTOR: Yes, your way of communication with other species is inimical to them.

RIDLEY: We exist on the threshold.

DOCTOR: Ah. As do with the Dar Traders, which is why you were attracted to them, and they gave themselves to you willingly. They've submitted totally to your creature. But you end up killing those you try to communicate with.

RIDLEY: We understand this. We thought we could become machine.

DOCTOR: By taking the probes?

RIDLEY: By using their signals.

DOCTOR: You tried to computerise your organic self, but it didn't work. You killed Ridley. You corrupted the mechanics in his suit, then you corrupted Nancy when you tried to speak through her.

RIDLEY: They died.

DOCTOR: Yes. Everything you do perpetuates this death state. I'm sorry, but for them, you're incomprehensible, because your only means of communicating with them is through death. They simply can't understand. That's the most alien thing of all to them.

RIDLEY: But not to you.

DOCTOR: I've seen some things in my time that may surprise even you.

RIDLEY: Then you'll help us?

DOCTOR: Perhaps. Tell me how.

RIDLEY: We are ancient, we are alone. You know death. Help us.
DOCTOR: I can help you. But we do this my way. You must trade with me. You must give me everything.
RIDLEY: We will trade.
DOCTOR: Argh! Wait! Argh! No, that's too much! I can't... I can't... Stop!

MORS: It's the Decay. It's being drawn from the planet, attracted to its own mass in Ridley, or the creature on the ship. Sit down and rest, I'll sort this... Oh no.

DANIKA: What is it?

MORS: So much for that idea. Ridley's destroyed the console.

DANIKA: Let me see. Maybe I can do something.

MORS: Not unless you can conjure a new one out of thin air.

DANIKA: Nancy's still active. Nancy, configure an orbit in the exo-sphere. Nancy!

NANCY: Of course, Danika. I see everything. You do not have the codes. There is only death. We will trade. Trade. Trade! Trade.

(Rumble.)

DANIKA: That's the Trader vessel. We've re-docked .

MORS: We should cut our losses and run, get to an escape pod.

DANIKA: They're controlled by Nancy. Besides, even if I was able to over-ride her, we wouldn't be able to get away from Antikon's Decay fast enough. We should find the Doctor and get to the Trader ship. They seem to be resistant to Decay.

MORS: The Doctor mentioned there was a creature on board that ship?

DANIKA: Well, most creatures retreat from fire. And the rarefied atmosphere burns. We could suit up and start a fire, try to kill the creature.

DOCTOR: (That's a bit drastic.

MORS: Doctor. I didn't think you'd make the party.

DOCTOR: I wouldn't give you the pleasure, Mors.

DANIKA: Did you find Ridley?

DOCTOR: I found him. We had an illuminating chat. I know what we're dealing with now.

MORS: Where is he? What did he tell you?

DOCTOR: He's gone. I traded with him. Absorbed his Decay. (cough) It was the only way to keep everyone safe.

DANIKA: Well, this is obviously some version of safe I'm not familiar with.

DOCTOR: I know what I'm doing. Unfortunately it requires a small sacrifice, but I'm getting rather good at those. (clang) That's my cue. Come on. To the Trader ship.

DOCTOR: Nancy, open this station airlock, please.

DANIKA: Is that hurting your voice?

DOCTOR: Nancy, it is us. We are Ridley. We are the Doctor. Open the door, please.

NANCY: Of course. Doctor. Ridley. Doctor.

(Door opens.)

DOCTOR: In, in. Hurry up.

DOCTOR: Now, open the airlock to the Traders' ship.

(Door opens.)

MORS: My God your creature certainly took care of things in here.

DANIKA: No!

MORS: After you, Danika.

DANIKA: That wall just snapped at me, Mors.

DOCTOR: It's just for show. The collection won't harm you. Trust me.

DANIKA: Ow!

DOCTOR: Nancy!

NANCY: Yes, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Secure the exterior airlock door and disengage the sky station. Then - ooo, ow! - then upload yourself onto this ship.

NANCY: Yes, Doctor.

(Signal.)

DANIKA: Oh! That was almost a hull breach.

DOCTOR: It's just removing what shouldn't be there.

MORS: A virus cannot suck an entire sky station back into a planet.

DOCTOR: You're going to have to start again, Mors. Ah! Decay was never a virus.

DANIKA: Oh, God.

DOCTOR: That was simply its nature. Ooo! It's a complex intelligence, one far greater than yours. To comprehend it, you have to die. Again. Aa!

DANIKA: Is that your plan, to sacrifice yourself to it?

DOCTOR: There's no time to explain.

MORS: What about them? The entire collection is alive and fused with Decay. Shouldn't we have suits?

DOCTOR: They're not radiating Decay. They won't bother us as long as you stay close to me. Oh! Now, Nancy?

NANCY: Yes, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Take me to my Tardis.

DANIKA: What exactly is it we're looking for?

DOCTOR: A blue box, about so high and so wide. Ah ha!

DAR TRADER 1: Doctor, we were awakened by Ridley. We have your machine.

NANCY: The Traders appropriated it for their collection.

DOCTOR: Attracted by residual artron energy. Am I right? Good to have you back, old girl.

MORS: Artron energy?

DOCTOR: Honours from a dead star.

MORS: But there's...

DOCTOR: It's a specialised field. You wouldn't understand.

DANIKA: A blue box? That's really it?

DOCTOR: She's rather more impressive on the inside. Unfortunately, you're not going to find out. I need you both to do something.

MORS: I hope we're not your sacrifice?

DOCTOR: You remember what you said in the control room, Danika, about the rarefied atmosphere here? Unfortunately, you had the right idea. Suit up.

DANIKA: There. The creature's grown a bit since I was last here.

MORS: Fascinating. I've studied this subject for so long, and I finally get to see my resurrection theory proved beyond belief.

DANIKA: And just think what you had to do to get here. Destroy a marriage, kill someone you loved.

MORS: That's unkind. I never meant for this to occur. Things slipped.

DANIKA: That's a slight understatement. The Doctor said again. You could die again. What did he mean?

MORS: I had Decay. I survived. I think I'm Patient Zero. They used me to spread it, but it's not an infection, it's a desperate communication. I've done tests on myself. You'd never know I had it.

DANIKA: Unless you die again, and come back?

MORS: Yes. I've wanted to get back to that place, that threshold. You have no idea how beautiful it is, so silent. But what if I didn't come back? I've been too scared to try.

DANIKA: Ridley found out, so you set him up, didn't you? After all your trials, your failures, he was your experiment.

MORS: Danika...

DANIKA: No, just shut up! Don't you dare defend yourself. Just... help me with this cable.

MORS: Do you have any idea how you're helping?

DANIKA: Well, he couldn't say so in front of the Trader, but the Doctor implied he needed the creature burned, along with the collection.

MORS: Yes, of course, so it no longer possesses a physical form. It has to retreat back to its original signal.

DANIKA: Which I imagine is what the cable is for. To absorb the signal back into his blue box.

MORS: Do we have to get so close to it?

DANIKA: No. You're going to have to get closer. Come on, Mors. You're practically family.

MORS: We don't get along. But fair enough. How are you going to start the fire?

DANIKA: A flare. I just hope these suits are as fire-retardant as they say on the label.

TRADER: This machine stinks of age and corruption.

DOCTOR: Rather indicative of the original owners.

TRADER: It is like you. You do not belong. You are alone.

DOCTOR: Yes, you're the only one, nobody else balancing the tightrope between life and death, only yourself for company because everyone leaves or dies, but you go on and on endlessly. Time just gets to be a bit much, doesn't it? Oh no. The creature has reached critical mass. This ship is going to be dragged back to Antikon.

TRADER: We will trade.

DOCTOR: You can't stop, can you? You're still intent on perpetuating death. Well, I'll give you death. Do it, old girl!

DANIKA: The Doctor's switched on.

MORS: I've got the cable. Use the flare, now!

DANIKA: You'd better be ready for this. Ah! Get down!

MORS: I think we upset it.

DANIKA: Oh, force it to transfer. Keep it alight. It's weakening already.

MORS: I can't get close enough. The heat's intense, I think it's eating through the suit.

DANIKA: Oh! Oh no, it's dividing again. Quick, grab a cable. You were the beginning, but you can be the end too, Mors. Throw the cable!

MORS: Time swims!

TRADER: Argh. There is something wrong.

DOCTOR: Everything's going to plan, actually.

TRADER: You have tricked us.

DOCTOR: I'm sorry. Despite your suicidal tendencies, your survival instinct was too strong. I had to do it this way.

TRADER: I am dying?

DOCTOR: I had to destroy your physical aspect. You're reverting to signal form. A form I'm now drawing into the Tardis's telepathic circuits. It's all right. Accept it. That's what you wanted.

TRADER: It is strange.

DOCTOR: It's not so pleasant, is it?

TRADER: It hurts.

(Gurgle, silence.)

DOCTOR: Ashes to ashes. Now, to end this.

MORS: You've got a pyromaniac streak in you, you know. Can we put out the fire now?

DANIKA: Not until everything's properly dead. It could come back otherwise.

MORS: Danika, look around. Everything's bone and gristle and ash. You've comprehensively destroyed any chance of it returning. There's only residual gas burn now anyway, and my suit material is getting very thin.

DANIKA: Oh, you're right. We need to get back to the Doctor.

NANCY: Danika? The Doctor has asked me... asked me... asked me...

DOCTOR [OC]: Tell Danika to get the engines operational. I can't deal with the Decay from Antikon if it floods the telepathic circuits in such great quantity. Tell her to get as far away from Antikon as she can. Help her, Nancy.

DANIKA: Piece of cake, Doctor. Nancy? Upload Sinatra programme, please.

NANCY: Of course, Danika. Sinatra programme operational, Danika. I have complete control over the freighter's engines.

MORS: I'm suitably impressed.

DANIKA: Oh, just a little something I prepared earlier in case the Traders were not as friendly as they appeared. Nancy, get us out of here, fast.

NANCY: Of course, Danika. My memory from the past few hours seems to be unclear. I apologise if before I did something stupid.

(Cloister Bell tolling.)

DOCTOR: You can cope with a bit of turbulence, old girl. Unless... The telepathic circuits. Oh no!

(Sizzle..)

TRADER: We are your death.

DOCTOR: You don't need to do this. I can give you Time, let you age, let you slip over the precipice into final death.

TRADER: There is only death.

DOCTOR: I know you, I understand. You long ago passed the point where you should have died.

TRADER: Kill us.

DOCTOR: I can give you death. When I die you will die along with me. I'm giving you my seventh death. Take the trade, please!

TRADER: It is too long.

TRADER 2: You promised.

(Madame Butterfly returns.)

DAR TRADER 1: There is another who can help us. Mors.

DOCTOR: No...!

DANIKA: Did he do it?

MORS: I can't tell. That sound might be normal for his machine.

DANIKA: Mors, thank you for your help back there.

MORS: I didn't do anything. That was you. I've never really done anything.

DANIKA: Mors, that was reconciliation. I don't want to stay mad at you forever.

MORS: Really?

DANIKA: Yes, but we need to talk.

(Signal.)

RIDLEY: Mors.

(A jumble of voices.)

DANIKA [OC]: Dying, Mors.

MORS [OC]: I will not be part of your collection.

DAR TRADER 2 [OC]: You sent Ridley to his death.

RIDLEY: Mors. I see everything, I see my death in yours. We will trade.

MORS: You want vengeance, Ridley, my boy. Try me.

(Cloister Bell tolling.)

DOCTOR: No! Stop this! Leave him alone! Take me!

DANIKA: Mors!

MORS: It's okay. I need to know. Oh Danika, it's so beautiful.

(Silence.)

DANIKA: Mors, come back. You're supposed to come back.

(Tardis door opens.)

DANIKA: You stopped the intelligence .

DOCTOR: I'm sorry. It didn't listen. I could have contained it for a while, but it wanted death and now.

DANIKA: It took Mors.

DOCTOR: Oh, he had an affinity with Decay after contracting it. It leapt into him, killed itself by killing him.

Finally took him over the threshold.

DANIKA: Ah. Death is a science after all.

DOCTOR: Danika, I don't usually travel alone. There's nothing for you here.

DANIKA: Oh but there is, Doctor. Listen. Listen to the silence.

DOCTOR: Is that what you want? A quiet life?

DANIKA: Yes. I do.

DOCTOR: Perhaps we wouldn't be the best of companions then. Goodbye, Danika Meanwhile.

DANIKA: Goodbye, Doctor.

DOCTOR: You've got rather a lot of Meanwhile to fill now. Do something useful with it, won't you?

(Tardis door closes. The Tardis dematerialises.)

DANIKA: Silence.

NANCY: There will only be silence in death.

DANIKA: What? Nancy? Nancy?

Spider's Shadow, by Stewart Sheargold

A Big Finish Productions Dr Who Audio Drama, released Jun 2008

DOCTOR: Hmm. Just a residual trace of Decay. Shouldn't cause too much trouble. Should dissipate into the Vortex over time. (sighs) In the meantime, alone again, with only Death for company. Again. Again. Did I just say that twice, again? Again? (an alarm sounds) Oh dear.

COLONEL: Are you sure no one saw us?

ALISON: I'm sure. Don't be so nervous. It's most unbecoming.

COLONEL: Oh. Isn't it equally unbecoming for a Princess to be fraternising with the lower ranks on the eve of battle?

ALISON: Well, I've never been a fan of stuffy tradition. (kiss) Although...

COLONEL: Although?

ALISON: In a strange way, this feels traditional, somehow.

COLONEL: Oh, I see. I'm just one of the long line of officer sweethearts.

ALISON: No, no, I didn't mean that.

COLONEL: Oh, no, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, my Princess, I did... I didn't mean to...

ALISON: Call me Alison. Please, Alec, tonight of all nights.

COLONEL: All right, Alison. But why tonight? Because it's the eve of a battle?

ALISON: I'm not sure. I...

COLONEL: Isn't one battle just like another, and tomorrow there'll be another victory over the spiders, and...

ALISON: Tomorrow? Tomorrow.

COLONEL: Alison? Are you all right?

ALISON: The night air is so oppressive, don't you think?

COLONEL: Er... er, yes, I suppose so. It is a little humid.

ALISON: Yes. It always is,

COLONEL: Always? What do you mean?

ALISON: I don't know. Alec, are you sure it's me you want?

COLONEL: What?

ALISON: Don't you think my sister, Princess Louisa is...?

COLONEL: Alison, no, of course not.

ALISON: Address me properly, Colonel!

COLONEL: Your Royal Highness, I...

ALISON: You do. You love Louise, not me. I've seen you looking at her, night after night.

COLONEL: Night after ni...?

ALISON: I've seen it. I've seen *you*. You only came out here with me because you dare not let her see us together, for fear that you may not appear available.

COLONEL: Please, your Royal Highness, I...

ALISON: You're ashamed of me. You hate me. You despise me.

COLONEL: I...

ALISON: You think I'm ugly. Admit it! Say it!

COLONEL: But... I... I...

(Crowd in background start counting down from ten.)

COLONEL: Please, I don't understand...

ALISON: You'd let me die if you could have her.

COLONEL: Die? What are you talking about? No.

ALISON: Yes you would. Yes you would!

(Hissing, roaring.)

COLONEL: What? Oh my God. Spiders. No!

CROWD: Happy New Year!

CROWD: Happy New Year!

LOUISA: Well, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Er... yes. I'm afraid I'm a bit confused.

LOUISA: Will you refuse your hostess a New Year's dance?

DOCTOR: Will I? I don't know. Er, I think I may be a little out of practice.

LOUISA: (laughs) Then will you take some good advice?

DOCTOR: Er, I think I'd better.

LOUISA: It is never wise to refuse a Princess on the eve of battle. Dance, Doctor, Dance.

DOCTOR: Oh. Ah. Hum.

LOUISA: You are falsely modest, my dear Doctor. Your footwork is very fine.

DOCTOR: Oh, thank you, your Highness. I'm a fast learner.

LOUISA: And with the blood flower in your lapel, you cut a dapper figure. I sense my guests' eyes upon you. Who is this mysterious elegant stranger? they're asking.

DOCTOR: Blood flower? Oh yes. A rose by any other name.

LOUISA: A what?

DOCTOR: A rose. It looks like a rose. You gave it to me in...
(Whoosh)

DOCTOR: In the library.

LOUISA: Who's there? I know someone's there. I shall call the waiters. And I warn you, they have very large proton knives.

DOCTOR: That won't be necessary.

LOUISA: Who are you?

DOCTOR: A guest. I, er... got a little lost, then I found this very impressive library and couldn't help but notice your splendid folio editions.

LOUISA: Your story is lacking, sir. You need only to walk through that door to find the ball in full swing. What are you? An assassin? A thief?

DOCTOR: What, of books? I've got signed copies of half of these. But you're right, young lady. I'm not a guest.

LOUISA: I am the Marshal Princess Louisa Keldafrian, joint Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Army Keldafria, and you will address me as your Royal Highness on pain of death.

DOCTOR: Well, your Royal Highness on pain of death, as I was saying, I'm not a guest.

LOUISA: An intruder? And one who thinks himself amusing at that. How did you enter the Palace?

DOCTOR: My er transport was drawn here.

LOUISA: Drawn? What exactly do you mean?

DOCTOR: Well, I'm not exactly sure. But now it won't let me leave.

LOUISA: Won't let you? It sounds like a very wilful vehicle.

DOCTOR: Can be, sometimes, but usually for good reason.

LOUISA: Really? And what is it in this case?

DOCTOR: There's something strange going on here.

LOUISA: Strange? What... what do you mean?

DOCTOR: You sense it too, don't you?

LOUISA: Sense what? I don't know what you're talking about. Who are you?

DOCTOR: I'm the Doctor. Why haven't you called your heavily-armed waiters yet?

LOUISA: I've fought nearly fifty campaigns across the Outer Reaches. I'm more than capable of looking after myself. Doctor? You are a man of medicine?

DOCTOR: Of sorts. Ah. Roses.

LOUISA: What?

DOCTOR: In your vase.

LOUISA: Roses? You mean my royal emblem, the blood flowers.

DOCTOR: Blood flowers. Yes, of course, I ... Interesting.

LOUISA: What is interesting, Doctor?

DOCTOR: I had a ro... er, blood flower in my lapel just now. It's gone. Do you know, Louise, I think you and I are going to be friends.

LOUISA: You will address me in the proper manner.

DOCTOR: My apologies. Does no one call you Louise, your Royal Highness?

LOUISA: My sister, but...

DOCTOR: Yes, your sister Alison.

LOUISA: Her Royal Highness the Marshall Princess Alison.

DOCTOR: But she calls you Louise, not Louisa. Yes, I remember.

LOUISA: But how would you know that? She only calls me that in private conversation. I don't like it, but she insists.

DOCTOR: And you allow her? Why?

LOUISA: I... You are impertinent, sir.

DOCTOR: You are the elder, and generally regarded as the more beautiful sister.

LOUISA: How dare you.

DOCTOR: So you indulge her because ... Give me the blood flower.

LOUISA: Why should...?

DOCTOR: Because, Louise, I haven't got time to waste.

LOUISA: A blood flower is a personal gift. I only grant them to the noblest, closest of friends.

DOCTOR: Yes, I know, I remember, but I haven't got time for all that.

LOUISA: No. I forbid it. You will not touch that flower.

(Whoosh.)

DOCTOR: Can I help you?

ALISON: (gasps) Who the hell are you?

DOCTOR: I am...

ALISON: Doesn't matter. We must call out the guard. Spiders...

DOCTOR: Spiders?

ALISON: Yes. Somehow, I don't know how. there are spiders in the Palace grounds attacking. Looks like a whole nest of them. They... We must...

DOCTOR: Where? I don't see any.

ALISON: But they... But... (opens door) But they were there. Alec was ... I don't understand.

DOCTOR: Alec? Oh yes, the Colonel, and you, secretly.

ALISON: Who are you? What are you doing h...? Is that a blood flower you're wearing?

DOCTOR: What? Oh yes, it is.

ALISON: Blood flowers are only worn in this Palace when my sister...

DOCTOR: Alison, no, don't touch.

(Whoosh.)

DOCTOR: So, which is the prisoner, and which is the captive? Neither of you exists now, Now you're inside the dimensions of the Tardis, you can tell me.

ALISON: You can't keep us in here!

LOUISA: Doctor, I thought you were my friend. Why are you doing this?

DOCTOR: Friend? We became friends, did we? Oh yes. I remember. Ha-ha, that's why you gave me the blood flower.

DOCTOR: You are the elder, and generally regarded as the more beautiful sister.

LOUISA: How dare you.

DOCTOR: So you indulge her because... ah yes. Because you pity her.

LOUISA: You, sir, are impertinent.

DOCTOR: Then call your waiters with their proton knives. Have me removed.

LOUISA: You seem very sure of yourself. Who sent you?

DOCTOR: No one sends me anywhere.

LOUISA: A free agent?

DOCTOR: As free as I can be.

LOUISA: And what's that supposed to mean?

DOCTOR: We're all slaves of our own conscience, aren't we, Louise?

LOUISA: Conscience?

DOCTOR: Duty, perhaps? The need to put things right? To try to make good?

LOUISA: My sister and I have a sworn duty to my people.

DOCTOR: To fight? To fight the spiders?

LOUISA: That is what you expect from us.

DOCTOR: Me?

LOUISA: The people.

DOCTOR: Ah, the people. What if I'm not one of the people?

LOUISA: What else could you be?

DOCTOR: What if I'm not from your world?

LOUISA: Well then, my dear Doctor, you would not be as you are. You would be a ravening monster, part of a mindless horde that threatens our survival. And I, along with my armies, would cut you down and see your conquered lands soaked in your own vile blood.

DOCTOR: Interesting. So that's what you do for a living.

LOUISA: You either know a good deal more than you're telling me, or...

DOCTOR: Or what?

LOUISA: Or you're a fool.

DOCTOR: Hmm. I wonder which it is. And you say you've fought over fifty campaigns?

LOUISA: Why are you here?

DOCTOR: And tomorrow, another battle. That's what this ball's about. A celebration on the eve of battle.

(Whoosh.)

COLONEL: (Well, that's what the eve of battle is for, is it not, sir?)

DOCTOR: Mmm? Sorry, I drifted off for a moment there.

COLONEL: I don't blame you. I saw you dancing with Princess Louisa. If I were you I wouldn't be able to think straight either.

DOCTOR: Really?

COLONEL: Yes.

DOCTOR: But what about you, Colonel? I saw you talking to her sister, the Princess Alison.

COLONEL: What?

DOCTOR: Ah, and she appears to be attempting to catch your eye now.

COLONEL: Don't gloat, Doctor. I accept you've won the fairer prize, but Alison - for all her plainness - is still a Princess. And every officer has his career to consider when it comes to courtship on the eve of battle.

DOCTOR: I see. Oh. She appears to be leaving.

COLONEL: And that is my signal. Excuse me. What the...? Oh my God. Spiders. No!

CROWD: Happy New Year!

LOUISA: Well, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Didn't you hear that? The scream?

LOUISA: Will you refuse your hostess a New Year's dance?

DOCTOR: No. I mean, yes. No, excuse me.

LOUISA: But... Doctor!

DOCTOR: Are you all right? Where's the Colonel?

ALISON: Who the hell are you?

DOCTOR: Well, I am...

ALISON: Doesn't matter. We must call out the guard. Spiders...

DOCTOR: Spiders? What? No, wait a minute. This, this is wrong. The order's wrong.

ALISON: Somehow, I don't know how, there are spiders in the Palace grounds on our world, a whole nest of them, attacking. They...

DOCTOR: There aren't any.

ALISON: We must...

DOCTOR: They're gone. But how could this be happening now?

ALISON: But they were there. Alec was ... I don't understand.

DOCTOR: Alec, yes, the young Colonel. He's already seen me dance with your sister Louise, when he left to meet you in the garden.

ALISON: How dare you.

DOCTOR: So how is it that Louise was just this moment asking me to dance for the first time?

ALISON: This is Louise's doing, isn't it? She's mocking me. I thought Alec really liked me. Can't she even grant me one moment of happiness? To feel beautiful just for one night? To be like her! Oh, why does she always have to punish me?

DOCTOR: Punish? Your Royal Highness, I don't think your sister has anything to do with those spiders appearing in the...

ALISON: Who are you? What are you doing in...? Is that a blood flower you're wearing?

DOCTOR: What? Oh yes it is. But... the blood flower. What is it that's so important about the blood flower?

ALISON: Blood flowers are the Royal emblem of my sister. They are only worn in this Palace when she personally grants...

DOCTOR: Yes, yes, I know all that. I wasn't talking about that. I mean, why do I know you shouldn't touch the blood flower?

ALISON: Give it to me. Give it to me now!

DOCTOR: Your Highness, I really don't think...

ALISON: I want to crush it, and throw it back in her stupid, beautiful face!

DOCTOR: Alison, listen to me.

ALISON: Give it to me!

DOCTOR: Are you punishing her? Are you that cruel? And how are you doing it?

ALISON: I demand you let us out of here!

DOCTOR: You think you're trapped now?

(Whoosh.)

ALISON: What have you done with him? What have you done with him? I demand to know!

LOUISA: Alison, I... Please, I don't understand.

ALISON: What did you do? You sent this man to play a trick on me. A cruel trick.

LOUISA: What man?

DOCTOR: I think she means me. It seems I'm here again now. Oh yes. And I'm wearing the rose.

LOUISA: Rose? You're wearing the blood flower I gave you.

DOCTOR: Oh yes, sorry. Blood flower.

ALISON: So you admit it. This man is close to you. You've conspired with him.

LOUISA: Alison, please. Let us retire to the library, and...

ALISON: And what? Patronise me? Pity me? Isn't that what you always do? Poor little Alison, your ugly sister everyone feels sorry for. Well, no more!

(Breaking ceramics)

ALISON: You've taunted me for the last time. Now you can find out what it's like to be the ugly one.

DOCTOR: Please, watch out!

LOUISA: Alison.

ALISON: Yes?

LOUISA: I want ... I need to talk to you.

ALISON: What about?

DOCTOR: Yes, your Highness. What about?

LOUISA: I think you know, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Do I? I sincerely hope so.

(Whoosh.)

DOCTOR: So you indulge her because... Ah yes. Because you pity her.

LOUISA: You, sir, are impertinent.

DOCTOR: Then call your waiters with their proton knives, have me removed.

LOUISA: You seem very sure of yourself. Who sent you?

DOCTOR: No-one sends me anywhere.

LOUISA: A free agent?

DOCTOR: As free as I can be.

LOUISA: And what's that supposed to mean?

DOCTOR: We're all slaves of our conscience, aren't we, Louise?

LOUISA: Conscience?

DOCTOR: Duty, perhaps? The need to put things right? To try to make good?

LOUISA: My sister and I have a sworn duty to my people.

DOCTOR: But what about to each other? Doesn't she live in your shadow, your beautiful shadow?

LOUISA: Who are you?

DOCTOR: I've already told you.

LOUISA: No. You haven't.

DOCTOR: Ah, but I have. Many, many times. Perhaps more than I can remember. It may be a million times, maybe ten. It may have been just once. But Louise, we have been here before. I feel it in my bones, and I think you do too.

LOUISA: You're talking nonsense. I should... I should have you removed.

DOCTOR: Maybe you did. Maybe you will. Yes, that's it. I think we've played this out before, but not always the same way.

LOUISA: This is absurd.

DOCTOR: No, I'm just better at this than you. I'm used to time travel, and I shouldn't be here. Come on, I'll show you.

LOUISA: Unhand me.

DOCTOR: I want to show you how I got here.

LOUISA: Your vehicle?

DOCTOR: Yes.

LOUISA: Why should I trust you? Well? Tell me that, Doctor.

DOCTOR: But you do trust me, don't you, Louise?

LOUISA: I... I... but, er...

DOCTOR: Yes, because you have trusted me. You can remember it, just a flicker of thought, something like *déjà vu*, maybe?

LOUISA: I... I do trust you, Doctor. But I... I really have no idea why.

DOCTOR: Intriguing, isn't it? Come on.

LOUISA: Your vehicle is in the Palace grounds?

DOCTOR: No. There's nothing in the Palace grounds, I hope. No, I landed the Tardis here.

LOUISA: Landed? You landed your vehicle in the conservatory? But that's impossible.

DOCTOR: There. What do you think? Doesn't matter. Let's go inside.

(Opens Tardis door.)

LOUISA: But it's...

LOUISA: I ... But...

DOCTOR: Yes?

(Door closes.)

LOUISA: I've been here before.

DOCTOR: You have? Ah yes, of course. Everything we're doing is all part of it.

LOUISA: Part of what?

DOCTOR: The gilded cage.

LOUISA: A cage?

DOCTOR: Yes. I think you've been imprisoned, Louise. Imprisoned in a moment of time, and now it's folding back in on itself. Look.

LOUISA: It looks like a spiral, glowing. Or a spider's web.

DOCTOR: Spiders? Hmm.

LOUISA: Swirling, twisting.

DOCTOR: It's a chaotic time loop, Louise. It's corrupting, destroying itself, and we're trapped in it.

LOUISA: But... how can Time...? I mean, Time flows from one moment to the next. It cannot...

DOCTOR: Time can do anything it pleases, given the right encouragement.

LOUISA: What's happening?

DOCTOR: Another fold in Time. Another distortion of the loop. We may not even be safe in...
(Whoosh.)

CROWD: Happy New Year!

LOUISA: Well, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Er, yes. Er, I'm afraid I'm a bit confused.

LOUISA: Will you refuse your hostess a New Year's dance?

DOCTOR: Will I? I don't know. I think I may be a little out of practice. Hold on a minute. It's happened again.

LOUISA: What's happened again?

DOCTOR: All this. The dancing, the music. Come on, Louise, think. You must be able to remember.

LOUISA: I... I'm not sure, but there's something I... It is never wise to refuse a Princess on the eve of battle.
Dance, Doctor, Dance.

DOCTOR: You're crushing my rose.

LOUISA: You mean blood flower.

DOCTOR: Blood flower, yes. Blood flower. Sometimes the time shifts are spontaneous because of the time loop folding in on itself.

LOUISA: Doctor, what in the world are you talking about?

DOCTOR : Other times, yes! It's when the blood flower is touched. Like...
(Whoosh.)

DOCTOR: This. The gardens.

ALISON: You think I'm ugly. Say it!

COLONEL: Please, I don't understand...

ALISON: You'd let me die if you could have her.

COLONEL: Die? What are you talking about? No.

ALISON: Yes you would. Yes you would!

COLONEL: What? Oh my God. Spiders. No!

(He screams, she screams.)

DOCTOR: Hello, Mister Spider. Ah, more of you. That's right. Alison said, the whole nest. So, what are you doing here? How did you get here? Actually, you're not really spiders at all, are you? You've all got different numbers of legs. One, two, three, hmm. Eleven on you, and, er... In fact, they're not like legs at all, are they? More like, er... I think it's time to touch my blood flower again.
(Whoosh.)

ALISON: Please, Alec, tonight of all nights.

COLONEL: All right, Alison.

LOUISA: Will you refuse your hostess a New Year's dance?

DOCTOR: Will I?

LOUISA: I am the Marshal Princess Louisa Keldafrian.

DOCTOR: You are the elder, and generally regarded as the more beautiful sister.

COLONEL: I accept you've won the fairer prize, but Alison - for all her plainness - is still a Princess.

CROWD: Happy New Year!

LOUISA: You would be a ravaging monster, part of a mindless horde that threatens our survival. And I, along with my armies, would cut you down and see your conquered lands soaked in your own vile blood.

ALISON: Where are we going? Why are you listening to this strange man, Louise?

LOUISA: Your vehicle is in the Palace grounds?

DOCTOR: No. There's nothing in the Palace grounds. I hope. No, I landed the Tardis here.

LOUISA: Landed? You landed your vehicle in the conservatory? But that's impossible.

DOCTOR: There. What do you think? Doesn't matter. Let's go inside. Oh, there's three of us this time. Hello, Alison.

LOUISA: But it's...

LOUISA: I... I think I recognise. But how?

ALISON: What are you talking about, Louise? Is this another of your tricks? Let me out!

LOUISA: Doctor, why have you brought us here?

DOCTOR: So, which is the prisoner? Which is the captive? Neither of you exists now. Now you're inside the dimensions of the Tardis. You can tell me.

ALISON: You can't keep us in here!

LOUISA: Doctor, I thought you were my friend.

DOCTOR: Oh yes, I remember. That's why you gave me the blood flower. Yes, I remember how this goes. I thought that one of you two had imprisoned the other in this loop.

ALISON: Loop?

DOCTOR: You may have limited space travel and proton knives, but you're hardly capable of creating a time loop prison. So who is? Who is looping time?

ALISON: But how can Time...? I mean, Time flows from one moment to the next. It cannot...

DOCTOR: Time can do anything it pleases, given the right encouragement.

LOUISA: What's happening?

DOCTOR: Another fold in Time, another distortion of the loop. We may not even be safe in... The dimensional shell of the Tardis is being breached.

ALISON: Spiders. Louise, look out.

LOUISA: And we have no weapons. Doctor, you must let us out of here.

DOCTOR: Are you here to kill us? Answer me.

ALISON: Are you mad? Spiders can't talk.

LOUISA: They are just crazed, evil beasts. Mindless, destructive. They're merely...

DOCTOR: They're not merely anything, Louise. I don't know what they are, but they are not spiders, not of any kind. Mere spiders, no matter how gigantic, couldn't penetrate the Tardis. And look at them. Those aren't legs. They look more like... like nerve endings. Of course, that's it.

ALISON: They're going to kill us.

LOUISA: Yes, Doctor, this time loop we're talking about. They want to kill us, my sister and me. We are the leaders of their sworn enemies. If they kill us...

DOCTOR: What exactly? If they were to kill you, maybe they could live in peace. Maybe they wouldn't be cut down and see their conquered lands soaked in their own vile blood, as you so beautifully put it. Oh, come on, Mister Spider, you can do better than that. If you are nerve endings pressing yourselves into this dimension, then where's the rest of you? You're just part of something greater, something vastly intelligent. Am I right?

Please let me be right.

(Shell cracks.)

ALISON: Ugh! That's disgusting.

LOUISA: They are disgusting. Doctor, is it... giving birth?

DOCTOR: Perhaps. I'm not sure.

LOUISA: But who...?

HENRY: You are the intelligent one.

DOCTOR: Oh. Thank you very much.

HENRY: The intruder, the problem. I can predict what you're thinking.

DOCTOR: Can you now?

ALISON: What...? I mean, who...? How did you come out of that spider? How...?

(High-pitched tone.)

DOCTOR: What have you done to them?

HENRY: Suspended their time dimension. I predict that you are forming an analogy, that I am like an antibody, and making a virus to attack and destroy it. My interpretation of your facial expression confirms that I am correct in my prediction.

DOCTOR: Pointless to argue, I suppose.

HENRY: It is a good analogy. For how else would a man talk to a virus? That is also something I predict you are thinking.

DOCTOR: You said I was the intruder. That's never news to me.. I always am. But why am I the problem?

HENRY: I am a minute part of a being far greater than anything in this reality.

DOCTOR: Well, naturally. Pan-dimensional?

HENRY: The description will suffice.

DOCTOR: That's nice. What should I call you?

HENRY: What you will.

DOCTOR: How about Henry?

HENRY: If it is efficacious.

DOCTOR: So, Henry, why do you let your spidery nerve endings protrude into our reality?

HENRY: I predict you are thinking, why does a dog put its nose out of a car window, and... ah yes. Why do we paddle in the sea. They are apposite analogies.

DOCTOR: You're mimicking my thinking very well, Henry. I feel a little redundant.

HENRY: Then you are now realising that your dimensional craft was drawn into this time loop, that your presence in it has disrupted it, and is...

DOCTOR: Causing it to collapse. That's a very annoying habit you've got there, you know. But why did you create the loop in the first place?

(Whoosh.)

LOUISA: You would be a ravaging monster, part of a mindless horde that threatens our survival. And I, along with my armies, would cut you down and see your conquered lands soaked in your own vile blood.

(Whoosh)

DOCTOR: To stop their people destroying your nerve endings, you wove a dimensional cocoon of Time to trap them in.

HENRY: We don't believe in capital punishment, is what you're thinking, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Yes. But why have you...?

HENRY: You have all the answers. You're thinking them now. If left in a time loop, the irrational jealousy of one sister, played over and over again, would grow and grow, and finally, they would destroy each other. But you intruded, fractured the dimensional cocoon, interfered. Not just by being here, but by your advice to Princess Louisa.

DOCTOR: What was that advice? I don't remember.

HENRY: It stopped them from killing each other. You are the problem.

DOCTOR: Well, how do you solve me?

HENRY: We will first destroy your craft, then you.

DOCTOR: No. I thought you didn't believe in capital punishment.

HENRY: You are a bug in the system. You will be purged.

DOCTOR: What about the blood flower? Yes. What about it? Every time it was touched... Of course! Ha, ha! Not so keen to predict my thoughts now, are you? Go on, I dare you, Henry.

HENRY: The blood flowers grow on the plains where the Keldafrians cut down our nerve endings. The flowers are infused with our life fluids.

DOCTOR: Blood flowers. Literally, filled with your blood and still connected to you, Henry, to the central nervous system of a pan-dimensional being. That's why touching it affects control of the loop. Time to loop again, Henry.

HENRY: You will not escape us.

DOCTOR: That sounds like a challenge.

(Whoosh.)

(Cheering and celebrations.)

DOCTOR: No. Try again. Ha, ha.

(Whoosh.)

LOUISA: Will you refuse your hostess a New Year's dance?

DOCTOR: No, not there, no.

(Whoosh.)

ALISON: Die if you could have her.

COLONEL: Die?

DOCTOR: No. Try again.

(Whoosh.)

DOCTOR: Ah. This could be it. We're all slaves of our conscience, aren't we, Louise?

LOUISA: Conscience?

DOCTOR: Duty, perhaps? The need to put things right? To try to make good. Yes, this is the right bit of the loop.

LOUISA: My sister and I have a sworn duty to my people.

DOCTOR: But what about to each other? Doesn't she live in your shadow, your beautiful shadow?

LOUISA: It is not your place.

DOCTOR: And you know she's unhappy, don't you?

LOUISA: I...

DOCTOR: The young Colonel she loves - Alec, isn't it? - all he can do is gaze at you, and you ignore him. It would break Alison's heart if you returned Alec's affections.
LOUISA: How do you know this?
DOCTOR: Does it matter? Isn't it true?
LOUISA: Yes, but... I don't know what else to do.
DOCTOR: Tell her the one thing you're tired of hearing.
LOUISA: I don't understand.
DOCTOR: The one thing that would never occur to you to say because you're so bored of hearing the words.
LOUISA: What?
DOCTOR: Tell her she's beautiful, Louise.
(Whoosh.)

ALISON: You've taunted me for the last time. Now you can find out what it's like to be the ugly one.
DOCTOR: Louise, watch out.
LOUISA: Alison.
ALISON: Yes?
LOUISA: I want... I need to talk to you.
ALISON: What about?
DOCTOR: Yes, your Highness. What about?
LOUISA: I think you know, Doctor.
DOCTOR: Do I? I sincerely hope so.
LOUISA: You're beautiful, Alison.
ALISON: What?
LOUISA: You're beautiful.
(Whoosh.)

DOCTOR: Yes. That's what was wrong. That was the problem. I altered the loop so that Louise and Alison no longer hated each other.
HENRY: So that Alec no longer felt ashamed to be seen with Alison.
DOCTOR: They didn't go outside, and your nerve endings didn't attack. So what's so bad about that, Henry?
HENRY: You are still here, Doctor.
DOCTOR: Yes, just me, all alone, with only... Oh, that's it! Only Death for company. Did you predict that thought, Henry?
HENRY: I do not comprehend.
DOCTOR: Residual Decay. And you were going to purge me. Ha! All I have to do is purge the Decay from the Tardis now.
HENRY: What are you doing?
DOCTOR: You may be multi-dimensional, but your nerve endings are in this dimension, and there's nothing in this dimension that can resist Death.
HENRY: Very clever, Doctor.
DOCTOR: You're too kind.

ALISON: What's going on out there?
LOUISA: Guards?
(Door opens.)
DOCTOR: Your Royal Highnesses.
GUARD: Sorry, your Highness. We don't know how he got...
LOUISA: What is the meaning of this?
ALISON: He's wearing a blood flower. How is that possible?
DOCTOR: Ah. I imagined all the blood flowers faded away when the spiders vanished.
LOUISA: That is common knowledge.
DOCTOR: Yes. Mine's only survived because of the time displacement. (wibble) Oh. There it goes.
ALISON: What is your business here?
GUARD: Speak up.
DOCTOR: Mmm. What big knives you have. Ladies, I have but one purpose. To congratulate the beautiful Princess Alison on her forthcoming wedding.
ALISON: Er, is that all?
LOUISA: You forced your way into the Palace merely to...?
DOCTOR: And to join with you in celebrating the vanishing of the spiders and this new glorious era of peace.
ALISON: Is that it?
DOCTOR: That's it. I'll go now, if I may.
GUARD: Your Royal Highnesses, he should be interrogated.
LOUISA: No. I have just one interrogative for him. Where did you get that rose?

DOCTOR: You said rose.

LOUISA: What?

DOCTOR: It was a blood flower.

LOUISA: Have we met before, Doctor?

ALISON: Doctor? Louise, how did...?

DOCTOR: You know my name.

LOUISA: I don't... I don't know you. And yet...

DOCTOR: Oh, I've just got one of those faces. Honest, trustworthy, unforgettable.

LOUISA: I...

DOCTOR: Tell me, Princess Alison, is this the wedding dress?

ALISON: Er, yes. Yes it is.

LOUISA: And doesn't she look beautiful in it.

DOCTOR: Yes, your Royal Highness. She really does.